

ASTA ODDSON

**POEMS
FOR PLEASURE**

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Mrs. Asta Oddson

INTRODUCTION

Among the Icelandic people are many poets, great poets and minor poets. Some have reached the pinnacles of poetic expression, while some have travelled the lower slopes. But all have felt the stirrings of a longing to give poetic expression to their dreams of beauty, their flights of fancy, to some sudden awareness of life or of death, to some recognition of the intimate relationship between man and nature. An incident in their lives may bring out the poet in them, or some vision before whose reality they stand transfixed in wonder, or some fleeting thought that lifts them above the ordinary routine of living.

Many who have ventured into poetic expression of their thoughts or experience have appeared in print. Many have not. Among the latter is Asta Oddson, who, now for the first time is publishing some of her random poems, poems composed under many circumstances and in many places. On occasion while driving over country roads, to dispel the monotony she composed some of her poems and then stopped by the roadside to commit them to paper.

She now feels that she wishes to share some of these poems with her friends. She includes also some of the poetry of her brother, the late Dr. Kris Austmann, whom she admired greatly and who had a great appreciation of her in return.

Among these poems are to be found some real gems, which, but for this endeavour would have remained hidden from the eyes of interested friends and acquaintances, which interestingly calls to mind the well known lines by Thomas Gray in his Elegy, where he said,

Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

I congratulate Asta Oddson on this endeavour and deem it a privilege to write these few words in launching her small book on its way.

PHILIP M. PETURSSON

There is a pretty spot in Marshland
I'll always claim for my land
Tiger lilies there and bluebells
Will never, never die.
It's a land of rolling prairies
My heart goes back where early
I have left my youth behind me
Kissed it there and said "Goodbye".

MY GRANDMOTHER CAME FROM ICELAND

My grandmother sits a-spinning and nods her head and sings
And many a yarn for me is spun on the bobbin's magic wings.
My grandmother came from Iceland, many long years ago
But where she gets her stories from, no one will ever know.
When she has tired of spinning, the bobbins cease their whirl
She sits awhile and slumbers, perhaps dreams come to her.

The elves dance in the moonlight, in shadows dark trolls sit,
In frenzied furious action the manic berserks flit,
And for one magic moment the Seeing Eye's her gift.
Then slowly from her slumbrous eyes the gloomy shadows lift,
My grandmother lifts me on her knee, and tells me many things:
Of jarls and serfs and princesses, of commoners and kings.

CANADA

Fair land, fair land
Where my soul dwells in freedom
Where the prairies and the hills
Roll as God guiding wills
For thee dear Land, I must struggle and strive
For thee dear Land
Freedom must stay alive.

YOUTH AND SPRING

Oh the world in spring is lovely
Green grass and growing things,
Blue sky, cloud-flecked, above me
And within a soul that sings.

Like silver-tinkling fountains
Clear-eyed and fancy free
With the faith that moveth mountains
Youth gains its victory.

MY RICHES

Of all the things that have come my way
The most beautiful is this lovely day
Cool and clear and calm and fine
And every minute of it Mine!

Mine to joke and laugh with glee
Mine to listen and to see
Mine to lounge and read and sing
Mine in fact for everything.

SOMETHING-FOR-NOTHING JOHNNIE

Something-for-nothing Johnnie sat
Thinking of this and thinking of that,
Drumming up dreams of dizzy deals
For no one can say that Johnnie steals.

Something for nothing is logic too
For the air is free and the sky's clear blue,
Something for nothing the rich decree
An economical fallacy.

The newborn infant's legacy
Is something for nothing, 'tis plain to see
The statistical debt he acquires at birth
Has been spent by the financiers on earth.

Something-for-nothing Johnnie sat
Thinking of this and thinking of that,
Drumming up dreams of dizzy deals
For no one can say that Johnnie steals.

"Our social heritage could be made
To drip milk and honey for one decade.
The 'unearned increment' too is fine
It ought to be good for eight or nine."

So pondering, Johnnie sat and sat,
Thinking of this and thinking of that.
"That lot next to old man Jones
It ought to be good for eighty bones.

"A rumour of oil would shoot sky high
That section of land by old Joe Bligh
What a fortune in futures I could gain
If only I knew how to stop the rain!"

Something-for-nothing Johnnie sat
Thinking of this and thinking of that,
Drumming up dreams of dizzy deals
For no one can say that Johnnie steals.

POVERTY IS OF THE MIND

Poverty is of the mind
Poverty is lack of soul
You have plenty if you're kind
Plenty if you know your goal.

Riches is not gold alone
Riches is not having things
You are rich if you have known
Happiness that sharing brings.

The poorest man I ever met
Was rich in bonds and coin and lands
For him the sun of hope had set
Hate bound him fast in iron bands.

For him there was no joy in giving
He needs must strive for petty gain
For him there was no joy in living
For him not joy, but pain.

THAT LOVELY THING THAT DIED

You must follow me as I lead you on your way,
The birds will sing matins, the sun shine all day.
You must follow me though the shadows cross your path,
"From one may be taken the little that he hath."

I must be a signal that Faith may still abide,
"To one may be given the lovely thing that died."
I must be a signal that sorrows come and go,
Today may be tragic, tomorrow love lights glow.

You must follow me though the shadows cross your path,
"From one may be taken the little that he hath."
I must be a signal that Faith may still abide,
To you may be given that lovely thing that died.

NELSON RIVER

Blue river, blue river
Winding, winding
We rock and roll
On thy windswept breast.
O wind! Where dost thou come from?
O wind! Where dost thou go?
Blue river, blue river
Listening, listening?
You have your secrets
But you have to rest.

Swift river, swift river, flowing, flowing
Relentlessly north to the cold, cold sea.
Oh river bed deep! Who made thee?
Oh current so swift! Who steers?
Swift river, swift river—chilling, chilling
Right to the marrow of me.

THE QU'APPELLE VALLEY

Oh, the valley's very pretty
With its hills of apple green,
And the Qu'Appelle River flowing
Poplar, willow banks between.

I have stood upon its bridges
I have gazed into its streams
Seen the poplar, willows bending
In an avenue of dreams.

The soft gray shades of evening
Close round me like a shroud
As I hear the call — "Qu'Appelle, Qu'Appelle"
Distinct and clear, not loud.

My soul has sensed the sadness
In that love call from the past
That has bridged both time and distance
Brought me safely home at last.

A SPAN OF TIME

A little boy sat on a tiny knoll
Of grass so green it would cheer your soul
The knoll was set on a rambling ridge
On the left-hand side of a very large bridge.

On the right in a dark declivity
Slept a tattered wreck of humanity
A short span of time, a short span of space
Yet eons apart was each human face.

TWO EXTREMES

Sometimes the stream of life seems clear
No murky depths, nothing to fear
Like early morning calm and dear
And the arrogant call of the chanticleer.

Then comes a film before our eyes
That clouds the vision, mars the skies
We lose our way to paradise
Our souls intent to agonize.

Somewhere between these two extremes
There is a middle way it seems
Perhaps I'll find it in my dreams
Softly treading on moonlit beams.

A GLIMPSE OF THE SPARK DIVINE

When I look out of the face of Man
And the face of Woman too
And try to glimpse that spark divine
As poets used to do,

I see a face in a golden frame
A profile stern to view,
I look and see there is nothing there
Nothing, that is, that's true.

A glory has gone from out our midst
The angel's wing is a plane
Passion is metaphysical
And nothing now is the same.

The child today has no reverence
The man of the hour no dreams
Today we are all so factual
That nothing merely seems.

The present steers by the compass
The past steered by the stars
'Tis the vision and the glory
That mass production mars.

Oh set free your thoughts in the ether
Oh sing into limitless space
Have faith in the things of the spirit
Be humble and ask for God's grace.

THERE ARE THE ROSES

The house was old, ramshackle, bare
And sadly needing some repair,
As Newlyweds we first came there
Hearts all aquiver.
It turned away from the busy street
And there were roses—oh, so sweet!
In the arms of two maples, a lovers' seat
Near-by the river.

We've lived here many a long, long year,
Gladness and sorrow have both dwelt here;
In the arms of two maples ever so near
Grandfather dozes.
Newly-built houses I dimly see
Facing the street—on, endlessly—
But this is Home Sweet Home to me
And there are the roses.

And now that Age comes creeping on
I'm looking forward to the Dawn,
But the feet of Youth climb on and on
 'Tis so ordained.

Beauty and Youth are across the street,
Wealth and power seem there to meet,
But I hear no patter of little feet
 And what is gained?

"Old-fashioned lady across the way,
I live in a mansion new and gay,
We come and go, but your kind stay
 Please tell my why?
Here have I wealth and beauty too
My conscience is clear, my husband true
Old-fashioned lady how comes it you
 Are more happy than I?"

Child, I don't know that I can explain
For Age is wary and Youth is vain,
But we came here together just we twain
 The Lord disposes.
Perhaps it's because we don't face the street
There is such peace in this quiet retreat,
Love and Truth are here complete
 And there are the roses.

FROM THE DEAD ROOTS

You must root your heart in this Indian land
If ever you hope to understand
And from the dead roots a song will rise
With a melody fit for paradise.

How can plants root in this rocky soil?
Is the little plot worth the mighty toil?
Does effort expended make greater worth?
Are the strivers and doers the salt of the earth?

There is a languor here that lovingly lies
On the drowsy dreamer with half-closed eyes,
An absence of movement a slack content,
An almost motionless merriment.

No happy hobo of distant lands
No beach-comber from the tropic sands
Feels the passive power of thought and nerve
That beats through the pulse of this Indian reserve.

The brown-eyed children softly stare
Their skin is dark yet they are fair;
A wicked and sinful thing to trace
A change like that in a small child's face.

But the Indian adult too is a child,
With his soft brown eyes so meek and mild;
And child-like too he can hide his hurt
When the white man's ways are cruel and curt.

WE DREAM TOO MUCH

We dream too much.
In wishful thinking we lay waste our powers;
Instead of doing we but squander idle hours.
We dream too much.

'Tis an idle kind of day-dreaming we do.
Instead of striving to make dreams come true;
We love the dreamer, but forget the deed;
Visions of grandeur have become our creed.
We dream too much.

And now, virile and vengeful hordes of hate
Are pressing at our very gate.

Dreamer awake!
And lest the shock be more than thou can bear
Lean on thy Lord, and lift thine eyes in prayer.

TREATY TIME

If you came up to Norway House
What would you really see?
'Tis after ten, the sun just set
A good hour daylight yet.

A pale-faced clerk in an office
Has finally got his count correct.

The Good Queen promised long ago
That sun would shine and rain would fall
Brave and squaw and papoose small
Would get their treaty money for all.

If you came up to Norway House
What would you think to see?
The coal blackness of a night
The flaming fire, with row and row
With squaws and braves.

At Treaty Time, at Treaty Time
What would you hope to find?

Days of feasting, dancing, singing,
Four days of barter, buying, bringing
Gay-coloured clothes and beads and drums.
A savage rhythmic swaying, swinging
Taking the native back and bringing
Tent shaking, witchcraft and medicine-men
Driving out spirits of evil
Truth is stranger than fiction—yes
Stranger but not deceiving.

I DO NOT NEED THE SUNSET

I do not need the sunset
I do not need the rain
To make the tears come to my eyes,
To think of you again.

I do not need the lakes clear blue
Nor yet the motors hum
To think of you incessantly
To wish for you to come.

I do not need a calendar
Nor tell the time of day
For you cannot come back to me
You never went away.

MY MOUNTAIN

May 19, 1963

I have to lie in bed you know
Because the doctor told me so;
My sister and my brother
My father and my mother
Are so afraid I'm turning queer
Because I just love lying here;
With three big pillows under my head
I'm almost sitting up in bed.
There's my mountain in the mirror
The chrome edge is my shining river,
Just now, the sky is evening blue
I climb and climb the hills with you.

SADLY SILENT

No one plays in my backyard
Anymore. There's no disorder—things stay put.
No doll abandoned, no lost ball—
Because, you see, the children went away.

I do not have to fuss and shout,
Because the toys lie round about
It's sadly silent all the day—
Because, you see, the children went away.

April, 1956

COURAGE

HONOUR

PRIDE

a small boy four
blue eyes fair hair good shoulders
no puny scapulas
a dish with fruit on the table
a hand raised
to punish
boy likes oranges
there is no cringing protest smolders
fearless and blue
eyes are true
the boy so small four
stands erect proudly
courage honour pride
now a man still fair eyes blue
weary of compromise
shoulders sagging
are all three tarnished

GRANDMA

Norway House, Man., 1960

Go light your lamp with the old-fashioned wick
Go sit in the brown rocking chair,
He may be early, he may be late,
But he knows you will still be there.

Did I fall asleep in the rocking chair?
Was that his step at the door?
An eery feeling creeps into my heart
Is that a creak in the floor?

Oh, the years are many, the years are long,
The old creak is still in the floor.
I sit, as before, in the old rocking chair
And I still hear his step at the door.

THE BOUNDLESS NORTH

Mile after measured mile extend
Lonely, lingering places,
No habitations here befriend
Man with his mundane graces.
Natural beauty has the North
Ruggedness, realistic,
Here the spirit may well sail forth
Untrammeled, optimistic.

New people travelling from old lands,
See this vastness bewitching,
Spellbound, holding each other's hands;
Hopes to their stars they are hitching.
Grandeur and greatness dwell in space
While mice and men live in squalor,
God give us men with inspiration
To develop this primeval part of our nation.

INTRODUCTION

It happened that I found seven poems typed double; this makes me feel that Dr. K. J. Austmann — my brother — had decided to send them to the papers or was beginning to have his poems put in a book.

Several years have passed since Dr. Kristjan J. Austmann died — now I am putting his seven poems and his picture in my little book.

After finding these seven poems I found a number of poems — English and Icelandic — but they will need some work, and now I am not able to do that; all I can do is to send them to his son and daughter. But it may make them feel better to see these poems in good shape.

Asta Oddson



Dr. Kristjan Austmann

UNSKILLED FINGERS

I bought me late a mandolin
To lure the laggard hour away:
An unaccustomed instrument
I loved to hear and longed to play.

But Oh, the maze of string and fret
That trips my fingers as they climb,
Striving to strike some cherished note
Of predetermined pitch and time.

Unlearned, unskilled we plunk along,
To every squeak and squawk immune,
Flaying alive some hapless song
My fumbling fingers found too soon.

SKILL TO TEACH

So, let the knowing
Not be too bold
Mistake in use or
Teaching to scold.

Ware let them be, those
Skilled to expound,
Lest they mislead to
Error profound.

Most of all must those
Most skilled to use,
Most humbly labour
Lest they abuse.

ANTHEM AT DAWN

*"Hark! hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings
And Phoebus 'gins arise."*

-WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Sing! sing! my heart, sing out in full acclaim
And greet the dawn of yet another morn;
The shadows that oppressed dim night's domain
Defile away as day once more is born.

Sing! sing! my heart, and soar to heights unknown
And swell the glory of thy God on high;
In welling rapture life's sweet hope enthrone
And to supreme achievement all defy!

O, let the heavens ring with thy wild note
The God-wish in the heart of man extol;;
As up and on he striveth, as by rote,
Stave thou the unspoke yearning of his soul!

Nor yet forget the lowly or the lone
Who lamely falter on their twisted foot;
And spare a note for blossoms that are bloom. —
A prayer for buds that cluster in the shoot!

But speed thee! speed thee with thy surging theme,
Too brief the hour that blazens on our way;
We pause here but a moment half a-dream
Till life's allure bids us to toil, — and pray.

OH, PLUCK THE ROSE WHILST THAT YOU MAY

Oh, pluck the rose whilst that you may
The petals soon must perish,
The sweet aroma cannot stay,
So, take it, then, and cherish.

God made the nectar to be sipped,
He meant that you should take it;
Decline it and the bud is stripped
And nothing can remake it.

For once, and only once, we live,
Time speeds in ruthless foment,
And vain regrets can never give
You back this golden moment.

Oh, pluck the rose, then, whilst you may,
It's bloom is soon abraded;
Remembrance has not much to say
Of roses merely faded.

See, pluck, sip, smell the gift sublime,
Regret it you will never;
The fragrant memory of this time
Will live forever, ever!

And so this blossom, born to be
Brief interlude of pleasure,
Through all your life's eternity
Distils a priceless treasure.

LONDON WITHOUT YOU

Nine million wights their courses run
Around this spot that's London's own
Each is a little beam of light,
That flicks is in the musty brown,

And each on flickers little spill
And flutters feebly and carries on
But all together their light is nil
And all is dark when the day is done.

A moon and I, just peer about
Alone, alone this sea of souls
The sun that light has gone away
I shine no more o'er the stormy shoals.

No one but you dear wife to pile
Would send my woolly underwear
But let the sunshine of your smile
Fly gloom and coldness disappear.

TRIAD OF KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is one thing,
Using, another
Yet is a third one,
Teaching a brother.

Skill to acquire,
Skill for to use,
Skill to impart it
Seldom fuse.

Each generation
Learns, as it must,
All human knowledge
Carried in trust;

All in a hurry,
All on the run,
All in a lifetime
All must be won.

THE GLORY HAS GONE

A glory has gone from out our midst
The Angels wing is a plane
Passion is metaphysical
And nothing now is same.

The child to-day has no reverence
The man of the hour no dreams
To-day we are so factual
That nothing merely seems.

The present steers by the compass
The past steered by the stars
'Tis the vision and the glory
That mass production mars.

Oh set free your thoughts in the ether
Oh sing into limitless space
Have faith in the things of the spirit
Be humble and ask for God's grace.

